

APR 4 1960

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION
& EDUCATION

CHRISTIANITY and CRISIS

A Christian Journal of Opinion

The Moral Needs of an Organization Society

The resignation under pressure of the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, John Doerfer, recalls again the confused and inadequate—perhaps even wistful—concern of Americans with their own moral state in the last decade.

It may not be quite true that while the curve of religious interests has been rising there has been a decline in ethical behavior. But something is shaky in our moral foundation. And though Americans have been vocally concerned about this, they have not always been concerned about the right things, in the right way.

The national self-doubting about our educational system after the sputnik did not probe very deeply or lead to much educational reform. Similarly, the concern with "morality" following the Van Doren episode and the payola revelations has contributed little to our moral self-understanding. Rather than probe deeply, we have seized on the simpler, clearer, smaller items to assuage the uneasiness that is created by more important but more complicated and confusing trends. Crucial questions are raised, and trifling answers given. For example, the social role of television is brought into question and the answer of CBS President Stanton is earnestly to insist that his programs *tell* the audience that laughter is canned. This excess of honesty in small matters is accepted as a substitute for responsibility in large matters.

So with the American people's troubled interest in "morality" in the 1950's.

It began with the "corruption" that was made into too much of a partisan issue in the 1952 cam-

paign. The problem of moral standards in government was vastly oversimplified, and the importance of "corruption" as a political issue was inflated. In an age of complex world-wide policy decisions, "corruption" served all too easily as a substitute issue by which the simple moral distinctions of the past could be maintained.

But "corruption" didn't stop on schedule. There was a poetic if not an actual justice in the Adams-Goldfine affair: too much having been made, in too partisan a manner, of Truman's "corruption" by people like Mr. Adams, then too much, in turn, was made of Mr. Adam's own foolishness. The continuing evidence of dubious or corrupt behavior, in government and out, has shown rather clearly that the partisan-political explanations were not adequate. No one thinks to connect President Eisenhower and his administration with the "moral tone" of the age of payola; the President is even exempt from any blame for Mr. Adams, Mr. Doerfer and company. There are great advantages in being a Good Man by definition.

This inclination to seize on easy explanations remains. Just as featuring "corruption" as a major "issue" with partisan implications was unbalanced, so the present furor at particular cases is out of line. We do not go on to ask about the complex of persons and groups involved, about the *structural* elements that encourage dubious practices, about the larger ethical issues of social policy. Mr. Van Doren showed himself from the start to (and perhaps especially in) the finish of his affair to lack elementary moral sensitivity. But he was

not alone. Other persons (what happened to the Revsons?) and an industry should have shared his blame.

Ethically dubious practices in government, labor unions and now in the public arts receives a kind of publicity and condemnation that has not yet been matched by corresponding attention to similar practices in the business community, which, in addition to their independent significance, have usually also been involved in these incidents. (Witness the unabashed wooing of those in charge of military procurement by certain parts of the aircraft industry with lavish entertainment on sunny island resorts.) Behind each bribe is a bribe-giver; each fixed TV quiz had a sponsor; and if Mr. Doerfer should not have spent that week on a yacht, perhaps Mr. Storer should not have offered it.

We are now in a new world of giant organizations with public responsibilities where the old rules of business ethics and individual morality are not adequate, and where new rules and sensitivities have not yet been developed. Their development is deterred by treating individual cases as isolated examples of villainy. Most of all, however, we need to confront the new social-ethical questions. No doubt Mr. Doerfer should not have taken that fancy vacation, but his most important failing had to do with FCC policy. There was not enough regulation of and pressure on the industry by an agency charged with the responsibility of protecting the public interest.

The chief moral failing of Americans in the Fifties was not that in a complicated new organization world some of us could not be individually honest, but rather that more of us could not be socially responsible.

W. L. M.

THE VANDERBILT FRACAS

SOME OF the most crucial issues of Christian social ethics have recently focused in events surrounding a young Negro Methodist minister, the Rev. James M. Lawson. The nation quickly learned a small part of the story: that Vanderbilt University expelled Mr. Lawson from its Divinity School for his part in the "sit-ins" that are sweeping the South and that Nashville police later arrested him.

Since press coverage has been extremely meager

—the faculty's story has not yet been fully told—we will note some of the important details in order to comment on these issues. Even these bare facts, however, caused consternation in the student Christian movement, the National Council of Churches, and on many college and seminary campuses across the country. The shock was the greater because Vanderbilt had the reputation of being one of the most enlightened Southern universities.

Mr. Lawson, formerly a leader in the Methodist youth movement and a short-term missionary to India, was to be graduated from the Divinity School in June. An intelligent man of attractive personality, he is also a regional secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. As the "sit-ins" developed, the local press depicted Mr. Lawson as the field general of the movement. This was clearly an exaggeration. In a city of Negro universities no instigator was needed for the campaign; in fact no leader could have stopped it.

But Mr. Lawson played a significant role, for which some Nashville white citizens have expressed gratitude, in developing the remarkable discipline of the demonstrators. All reports agree that the Negroes' non-violent protest was amazing. They accepted insults without showing hostility. When physically attacked, they did not retaliate. The police, instead of protecting them against assault, arrested them.

By an unfortunate coincidence the university's Executive Committee of the Board of Trust was in session, planning a financial campaign, when matters came to a head. A prominent member of the committee is publisher of *The Nashville Banner*, which was frantically attacking Mr. Lawson as the Negro counterpart of John Kasper. Although Mr. Lawson had not been arrested, he was a public symbol of the Negro protest. The committee offered him a chance to sign a promise to stay completely out of the protests. When he did not sign by the given deadline, the Chancellor announced his dismissal.

The faculty of the Divinity School was permitted no part in the decision. When presented with a *fait accompli*, it was deeply offended. Almost all the members signed a protest, saying: "Whether or not we approve his strategy, we believe that Mr. Lawson has endeavored to follow his Christian conscience, and we see no adequate justification for his expulsion. . . ."

The student body rallied around Mr. Lawson. One observer reported that there would not have been ten students left in the school if the faculty had not taken its stand. The students, it should be noted, are mostly Southerners, many of them from Alabama and Mississippi. Most of them preach every Sunday to congregations that reflect the prevailing Southern ethos. Many of them disagreed with the "sit-ins." But unanimously they adopted a statement protesting the expulsion, supporting Mr. Lawson personally, and upholding the right of the Negro community to protest.

A day later, when police arrested Mr. Lawson, they found him in a Negro church with a group including thirty white divinity students. The Divinity School faculty joined to put up bail for Mr. Lawson's release. Contrary to his earlier intention, he accepted the bail as a public symbol of white concern for Nashville Negroes.

In the rest of the university, 111 faculty members, including twelve department heads, issued a statement commending Nashville Negroes and the Divinity School for "patience and forbearance under extreme provocation."

Among the prominent issues in the case two especially demand comment. The first concerns

the relation of ethics to law. Since the Supreme Court decision of 1954, Southern Christian liberals have generally defended integration less on grounds that it is morally right than because it is the law. Chancellor Harvie Branscomb of Vanderbilt, a noted New Testament scholar and a man of good will, has long worked for better race relations. A Jewish group had recently honored him for his contribution to human relations. But in the crisis he could see no issue transcending this extremely dubious legal one. His stand forces the urgent question: Shall the university, heir of the traditions of ethics that stem from Moses and Socrates, now take its inviolable stand on the decisions of a biased judge in a municipal court?

The second issue concerns the relation of university faculties to trustees. American universities survive by the grace of devoted businessmen, who often give generously of their talents and wealth with little enough thanks. But when men who are not educators hand down basic policy decisions without consulting the faculty, higher education is in a desperate situation.

If the Vanderbilt fracas can contribute to American understanding of these issues, it may yet do some good.

R. L. S.

Jesus Christ, the Beginning

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. (Colossians 1: 17-18)

AT EASTER, God's victory is proclaimed over sin and death. For this we feel a profound sense of gratitude. As we stand in the midst of all grief and all trials, we hear again, in faith, the word of God. He who took upon himself our human nature and bore our griefs and sorrows, suffering our human lot to the very end in a cruel death—Jesus Christ—is the risen and eternal Lord of life, opening the way to redemption for every creature. We can scarcely imagine, once we have known it, what it would mean to face life without the Easter faith.

Because the message of the risen Lord stands at the heart of our faith, we experience a certain

perplexity when we come to interpret it. That perplexity begins in the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus. What is reported here, and what is the connection between this strange event and the victory of God over sin and death?

Our difficulties in penetrating the mystery of the resurrection are certainly not all created by modern science, or by learning how the gospels came into being. The mystery is there in the story itself, in the angels at the tomb, the two women hearing that Jesus is risen and afraid to tell anyone, the sudden appearances and disappearances of the Lord, his word to Mary, "touch me not," his ascension, and his appearance to Paul on the Damascus road.

We cannot treat this simply as literal history. We have to understand it as an event on the plane of personal faith. It was the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, that created anew the faith of the disciples, not just the reappearance of one human being after death. It was the re-establishment of the meaning of the profound and tragic experience through which they had gone with

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him that made these appearances the ground of a saving faith.

The *fact* of the resurrection is certain enough. The risen Lord appeared to the disciples confirming their faith, establishing the power of God to finish the work he had done in his Son. But the *mode* of the resurrection, the way of Christ's appearing, is something about which Christians have very different views. The meaning of what God has accomplished in the story of Jesus does not lie on the surface of a few ancient accounts of some special visions. It lies in the depth of the Church's witness to one in whom men saw God himself taking the form of a servant and sharing our human lot that we might be brought into a new life with him.

As Paul says of the meaning of Christ, he is the beginning. This is the faith of the Church, that through Jesus Christ a new order of life has come into our existence, penetrated our very being with its saving power and promise. To understand the resurrection of Christ means to try to understand this new order of life as it challenges our present existence. The resurrection is not a happening sometime, somewhere, removed from us. It is the power of God being made known to us as it was made known to those who first experienced Christ's presence.

How is he the beginning?

Raised from Sin

Christ is the beginning of a new life because he deals with the past burden of sin. The resurrection is first the raising of life from the death of sin. There is a connection between our dying and the reality of sin. It is as if our dying becomes the deepest expression of the darkness and meaninglessness of a life estranged from God.

Sin in the Christian vocabulary does not mean a series of moral wrongs, though it includes these. It means our personal estrangement from God. It means the lovelessness, the hatred, the resentment of life itself that lurks in our spirits. When Paul speaks of "being dead in our sins" he is striking at this character of sin, that it runs toward spiritual death.

Nothing is more emphatic in Paul's thought than the conviction that the resurrection of the body is resurrection from the body of sin. It is resurrection from the meaninglessness of life turned away from God. "Who will deliver me from this body of death," he cries out. It is the contest with sin, not with physical dying, that is at the center:

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that our sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him.

(Romans 6:6-8)

We misunderstand the Easter faith if we concentrate it all on the mystery of life after physical death, or take the meaning of the resurrection to be restricted to the special appearances of the risen Lord. It was the Christ who was raised; he is the one who has brought the message of the Kingdom of God with its judgment and mercy and made this message incarnate in his own person. Therefore the resurrection from the body of death is something accomplished by all that Jesus was and did.

When Jesus spoke in the line of prophets and exposed the viciousness of systems of prestige and power that laid heavy burdens on the poor, he was surely preparing the way for a new life, and setting men free from the burden of their collective sin. When he lifted from the human spirit the awful weight of believing that only through a scrupulous keeping of the law by force of will could man hope for the mercy of God, he was raising the human spirit from the death of the legalism and self-accusation that inevitably attends such a conception of God.

And when he offered to men burdened by conscience the parable of the two who prayed in the temple—the one trying to prove his righteousness and becoming a kind of walking sepulchre full of self-deceit, the other justified as he cast his reliance on the mercy of God—surely Jesus was raising men from the dead, and pointing the way to a new life. And when he chose to die at the hands of sinful men and went to the cross in obedience and courage, was he not there conquering death for us?

Pastor Martin Niemoller has told of his years in the concentration camp. He describes his meditations on the Cross, and how he came to see that the word from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," is the miracle of the life of Jesus. Surely those words were a victory over everything in life that lays waste to its goodness.

This is not to say that the full meaning of the resurrection was plain in all that Jesus said and did, or that the experience of the risen Lord added nothing to the meaning of his mission. But the Gospel of God's victory over sin is not founded solely on a special appearance at the end of Jesus'

life. It is founded upon all the mighty acts of God for our redemption.

Jesus is the beginning of a new life, then, because he brings the power of grace to cover the sin of the old life with its intolerable burden and its guilt. When in the words of the creed we gladly say we believe in the resurrection of the body, we are declaring that this body of death—hopeless, embittered, futile—can be raised by faith in God's grace and a new life begun.

A New Life, a New History

Jesus the crucified and risen Lord is the beginning because he created in the world a new life and began a new history through the community that he brought into being. This is the obvious historical fact of the resurrection that we can see with our own eyes. John Knox has helped us to see how out of the resurrection faith there came the Church, a new people living by the assurances found in that faith and continuing through history. In that sense surely there is a beginning in the story of Christ.

The word "beginning" that Paul used does not mean simply or primarily a chronological beginning. Jesus, he says, is the *arche*, that is the Origin, the Foundation of a new principle. He creates a new relationship between men and God.

What makes the new people *new* is that they live from this new principle. Now there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. Our universal humanity has been disclosed and reconciled in one who refused all parochial limitations to the love and concern he bore. Now everything in experience has a new significance, for it all takes its place in the story of man as he is met, judged and redeemed by God. Now there is repentance, and hope, and trust. To share the life of the new people, to share in this community wherever we find it, is to share in the body of the risen Christ and to participate in the new life.

When we experience the new community and its claim to be a new people, we are conscious of two challenges to such a claim.

First, do we mean to say that since Christ is the beginning of a new people, all other peoples before him and outside this historical community are without hope and without God in the world? There are some today who say this. But if God is love, then wherever men have known something even of brotherly love, they have known something of him. If God is merciful then where something is known of mercy surely the Christ is present. We need not be so intolerably provincial as to say

that all life outside of Christian history is nothing but sin and futility.

What we believe as Christians is that the final issue concerning the meaning of human life has been redefined for us in the story of Jesus Christ. A new and decisive disclosure of that meaning has taken place. God has personally addressed himself to us in terms that we can understand, for they are the terms of our human life. We can surely say that this Word of God is the meaning of all life, and that life without him may easily lose its way and become intolerable. But we can just as truly say that all life everywhere participates in this meaning in a measure that God has allowed, for "he has not left himself without witness" (Acts 14:17).

The second and even more serious problem for our claim to a new life in Christ and his community comes not from outside the Church but in it. We say the Church is the new order, but still it bears the marks of the old. An astute Jewish commentator has written:

The central problem of Christianity is: if the Messiah has come, why is the world so evil? For Judaism the problem is, if the world is so evil why does the Messiah not come? (Seymour Siegel, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, March 28, 1959)

It is not easy to give a convincing answer from either standpoint!

The problem is doubly difficult for Christianity when we acknowledge that in spite of the claim that the Church lives from Christ, she herself is tempted to the old sins and perhaps new ones. We are immeasurably in Reinhold Niebuhr's debt for his continual penetration of the fact that the very entry upon the new life in Christ brings its own temptations with it. Spiritual pride is only possible for those who have some sense of the spirit. And spiritual pride becomes a deadly corruption.

Though Christ is the beginning of the new life, the course of history is yet to run. The story of the Church is the story of human beings living with trust in the grace of God, forming the community of the forgiving and the forgiven. But it is the story of human life with all its depths and heights, its martyrs and saints, and its failures of love. It is the story of our life, with all its falsity, cruelty and illusions; but that life lifted up by faith into a new dimension where its meaning lies in God's contention with our failures.

The New Testament does indeed say that the Messiah has come, but it would have become only

a museum piece as a bit of ancient religious literature if it were not for the realism of its understanding of the Christian life as one of expectation. We are being transformed into the image of Christ; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Paul says:

We know the whole creation has been groaning in travail until now and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved.
(Romans 8:22-24)

The Easter faith declares that the story of man's attempt to find life by making idols of his clan, his race and his nation is old stuff. It is as old as man. There is nothing new or hopeful about it. But the new beginning makes all the difference in the meaning of our life. Boris Pasternak can declare in his novel that since Jesus "time and man can breathe freely."

The new and redeeming meaning in the Christian Gospel is a new way of looking at man. Christ died for all, for every race, for every people. He opened the way for man to recognize his brother as human. The world is created to be a home for man, not a prison house or a battlefield. This is the new and revolutionary assertion of Christianity. It is not easy to live with this faith. It is so absolute, so far beyond what this present shows, and yet in Christ the seed is sown in the human spirit. He is the beginning.

The Final Enemy: Death

But Christ must reign "until he hath put all his enemies under his feet; and the last enemy which shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25-26). Here Paul singles out death itself as the ultimate power that holds us in bondage. Is it another name here for Satan, and therefore to be connected again with the power of sin; or is it that for Paul life has a double enemy? Death must be recognized as threatening the meaning of life on its own account apart from sin.

For modern men the sense of death as a boundary beyond which there is nothing is very strong. This fact is a part of the crisis in the modern spirit. Here is a recently reported interview with a French tool and die maker who is not a Communist, but who votes like one:

What the workers want is a good standard of living and more opportunities for themselves and their kids. But nothing I say is going to make any difference.

All I want is to enjoy myself in this life. For all I know it may be the only one I have. When you're dead, maybe you've had it. . . . All I want is to have a good life, that's all. Is that too much?

Surely this man speaks for a great many in our time. It is a standing conviction among the critics of Christianity that it has turned attention away from the plight of the underprivileged by its preoccupation with another life beyond this world and its problems. But the Easter faith affirms the crucial significance of this earthly life. It affirms that the meaning of this life leads to a destiny in eternity. Life has a final goal in God and his purposes.

It is true here also that Christians take different views of the mode of conceiving eternal life. For many this means a belief in the immortality of the conscious personality. There is a life beyond death that continues the very substance of personal existence in history. For others, to say this much is to presume to know the nature of God's eternity beyond our human sight. They insist upon more reserve in our statements about the manner of our participation in the life beyond death.

But the heart of the matter is surely this, that in the coming of Christ and his meeting death as he did, a new faith about death and what lies beyond it was created. Death no longer has the same meaning for us either as a threat of judgment without mercy or as a descent into nothingness. The action of God in Jesus Christ has opened the way to the surmounting of the fear of death.

Every parish minister has been a pastor to someone who is afraid to die. In so many cases the fear is not really of dying, but of lostness, of the burden of guilt, a fear of facing God. There is a right fear of God, but the message of the Gospel is that it never need become destructive fear, for his will is for reconciliation and a new life for all. The triumphant spirit in which the Christian faith meets death means more than the removal of fear. It is the positive spirit of trust and hope. It is giving ourselves into the keeping of God.

The Christian faith in the resurrection of the body has a different meaning from the idea of the soul's immortality. To speak of our immortal souls suggests that we have in our own power, or in some part of our being, the capacity to endure forever. But we are creatures. We live in these bodies subject to disease and decay. We are dependent in every breath upon the sustaining power of God. We have no basis for claims about our indestructibility. Therefore, to have faith in the

resurrection of the body means to believe not in our own power but in the redemptive power of God. Resurrection is God's act, not ours. Believing in the eternal God, we believe that our lives are hid with Christ in him. Nothing can separate us from him, neither life nor death.

Christ is the beginning because he has brought into the life of man a new hope that is open to the future, in which all the darkness and mystery is accepted with a belief in God's power to redeem.

Methodism and Segregation: A Case Study

WALTER G. MUELDER

THE REPORT of the Commission of Seventy on Methodism's jurisdictional system and the vigorous responses to that report display some significant dilemmas in Christian ethics and the power struggles in the Methodist Church. As a case study the work of the Commission shows the complexity and the compromises that may be forced by conflicts within the church and with its environment when the church operates within the framework of institutional unity.

At the outset it is important to note that the report deals with three major issues: the jurisdictional system as a whole; the Central Jurisdiction, based on race; and the program of eliminating discrimination everywhere in the Methodist Church.

Methodism is divided into five regional jurisdictions (North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern, Western) and one jurisdiction based on race (Central). Each jurisdiction is further divided into conferences that meet annually. The report would not change the basic jurisdictional conception but it would modify its operation in important respects.

The jurisdictional conferences, which are held quadrennially, are asked to meet at the time and place of the church's General Conference or just before it, rather than several months later as is now the case. The delegates to both jurisdictional and General Conference are to be the same. All the members of the jurisdictional conferences will have the benefit of the debates and discussions of the General Conference. Bishops will be elected in the jurisdictional conferences and consecrated at the General Conference. Provision is made to transfer bishops from one jurisdiction to

We know that death is not the end of our lives. They go on in God, judged by him, renewed by him, in his own way. In this body of sin and struggle we have been given a knowledge of God's overwhelming mercy, and in the message of eternal life the way has been opened for us to live in all things unto him, who is the author and finisher of our faith—Jesus Christ—whom God raised from the dead and made a living presence in his Church now and forever.

another and for their assignment to be made prior to the election of new bishops. It is proposed that the sessions of the General Conference be rotated in the several jurisdictions and that the 1964 meeting be held in the Southeastern Jurisdiction.

The effect of these proposals would be to stress the unity of the church, the general rather than the regional character of the episcopacy and to enhance the role of the General Conference. Regions that do not wish to build strong jurisdictional programs are permitted to leave the jurisdictional conference undeveloped. Thus constitutional sectionalism may fade away.

At the 1956 General Conference, Amendment Nine was passed. This liberalized the provisions under which Negro congregations and conferences can transfer from the Central Jurisdiction into other jurisdictions. This amendment clearly envisages the eventual liquidation of the Central Jurisdiction by a process of attrition. There is no change proposed in this constitutional provision. So far forty-four Negro congregations have entered into the process of transfer and six have completed the transfer from a conference of the Central Jurisdiction to a conference of another jurisdiction. None of these, however, is in the South. This fact has a significant bearing on the dynamics of the problem.

The third dimension of the report by the Seventy calls for a vigorous program of education and action under the special leadership of the Board of Social and Economic Relations. It would place focal responsibility on the annual conferences to work for integration and full fellowship among all Methodist churches and to plan co-operative strategies in evangelism, education and social service between Negroes and whites. The effect of this program would be to establish and

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enhance communication, break down barriers and witness to Christian community.

A Spectrum of Responses

Initial impressions growing out of press statements have focused on the fact that the report did not recommend an immediate abolition of the Central Jurisdiction. Headlines stressed the idea that the Commission of Seventy recommended the continuation of racial segregation. In this light the document appears as a do-nothing or *status quo* compromise, disloyal to the Gospel and to the General Conference, which in 1956 ordered a study of the whole jurisdictional system after twenty years of union.

After three years of study and an additional year of writing and commission haggling, how could hearings taken in twenty-four cities and an appropriation of \$200,000 result in so little? This study reveals no easy answers.

The responses to the report thus far have shown a wide range of reaction. The Chairman of the Commission, attorney Charles C. Parlin, has pointed out that immediate elimination of the Central Jurisdiction would turn Methodist Negroes into a "hopeless minority." He notes: "Eventually the Central Jurisdiction is doomed. It will go one way or another. It is the trend of the times."

Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, who with Bishop Arthur J. Moore fashioned the basic power compromise in the Commission, said: "I am personally opposed to the Central Jurisdiction and always have been. But I believe we move to the absolute by way of the relative." The relative to which he referred is not evident unless the modifications in the total jurisdictional conception are noted.

A response that has attracted national attention is that of the Drew Theological Seminary faculty. Their statement makes a primarily theological attack on the report which, according to them, "does not reflect the agony" the Commission must have felt. The "decisions are not explicitly informed by the claims of the Christian faith." "The unity of the church is defined in purely secular terms parallel with the unity of the nation, and the 'spirit of compromise' is substituted for the ministry of reconciliation."

There is a great deal of theological harassment of the Commission by the Drew faculty, with perhaps one functional proposal. The report should "call for the end of jurisdictional segregation by some reasonably proximate date." As one who urged this very idea as a member of the Com-

mission, asking for target dates in a progressive program of constitutional jurisdictional change, I can sympathize especially with this part of the Drew response.

The Christian Century has editorially warmed up to the Drew criticism and predicts that it draws "the battle lines for the principal struggle of the 1960 General Conference. No good can come to the Methodist Church if the General Conference wades or slides over the stern spiritual challenge laid down by the Drew statement." Having read this statement carefully, I must ask both the Drew faculty and *The Christian Century* whether without a program of involvement in the complexities of power and prejudice, and concrete proposals for constitutional modifications in the Methodist Church the seemingly profound theological attack is functionally more than ritual repentance.

However, if the Drew response sets off a denominational reaffirmation to put in motion a determined program of grass roots education and action implementing a deeper loyalty to Christ and his Church, it will make a real contribution. With this achieved, constitutional changes will naturally come more easily than the present impasse makes possible.

In the Deep South organized laymen regard the report as an unreasonable compromise. The Methodist Layman's Union of Alabama by no means speaks for the laity of the South; yet its views cannot be ignored as one power factor in the next General Conference.

"It is proposed to destroy the jurisdictional system by withdrawing its chief functions; by setting up machinery in the local church calculated to condition the members to accept gradually these new plans leading to an all powerful central church, unencumbered by jurisdictional considerations; by setting up a sort of civil rights committee in every conference to plan, to investigate and to report on local situations relating to progress or lack of progress in carrying out the integration program; and gradually to soften up the membership so that they will ultimately accept intimate association between white and colored in all church circles, leading inevitably to the home door." (The Methodist Layman's Union, Birmingham, January 29, 1960.)

A totally different response and proposal comes from the president of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, the Rev. Lloyd F. Worley, in the *Social Questions Bulletin*, February 1960. His proposal asks for a constitutional change that

would put the areas of the Central Jurisdiction into other jurisdictions that geographically overlap it, except that none would be transferred to the Southeastern Jurisdiction. In support of this legislation are the arguments that the Central Jurisdiction is thus taken out of the constitution of the church; it makes possible future progress with constitutional amendments; it will restore the situation that was surrendered in order to achieve unification in 1936-1939 and will regain lost ground; it gives consideration to those areas of the church as yet unwilling to accept complete integration; and it will place Negro Methodists in a position of equality.

But it is not possible to go back to 1939 or 1936.

Dilemmas of Accommodation and Unity

The report, as we have seen, expresses some of the deep-lying compromises and dilemmas that accompany Methodism's accommodation to the social order while seeking to manifest denominational unity. Some of the components in the dilemma may be listed as follows.

(1) Neither Methodist theology nor polity has been able to transcend effectively the caste mores of the South. It shares this dilemma with all other Christian bodies. Interracial churchmanship is still the exception in the North, as well. A recent survey conducted by the Boston University School of Theology shows a significant contrast in race relations attitudes among the various jurisdictions of the church. In the Southeastern Jurisdiction gradualism and "separate but equal" account for 81.8 per cent of the region's responses.

(2) The South is in a turbulent stage of transition and there are many signs of the breaking down of caste and class patterns in which the church is participating. Church leaders are sometimes heroic and often perplexed about next steps.

(3) Since the Supreme Court decision of 1954 local feelings have often been so violent as to worsen the relations among Negro and white Methodist groups. Panic and fear control the social distance in places where the love of Christ should produce faith and responsible strategy.

(4) At the grass roots of local community life there has been little communication among pastors and congregations across racial lines.

(5) There has been practically no comprehensive planning of denominational strategy across racial lines in the cities of the South or the North. Meanwhile the Central Jurisdiction is moribund,

if not declining. Present strategies are clearly failing.

(6) Though the Methodist Church is integrated at the top of the denomination in its Council of Bishops, in representation on general boards and agencies, and in delegations to the General Conference, this pattern is effective only at a significant social distance from the place where community decisions are made.

(7) There is no effective image in much of the South that the church would be expected to offer leadership in race relations. This means that the clergy have not validated their roles in providing Christian leadership for desegregation.

(8) Negro leaders feel strongly that the white Methodist bishops have abdicated leadership and that white pastors are prisoners in their own pulpits.

(9) Negro leaders are aware that the constitutional abolition of the Central Jurisdiction will not produce Christian fellowship, and they know that much Christian fellowship could be developed now if there were a mind and heart to have it.

(10) There is no constitutional barrier to prevent the evangelization of Negroes in many northern cities, yet leadership in white congregations has done little in this direction. At present forty per cent of the Negro population live in northern cities. Because of its middle class character as well as its racial ineptness, Methodism is losing proportionately among the working classes.

(11) Though the Drew document makes a strong theological indictment of the Commission Report, a more adequate theological preamble to the report or commentary on its provisions would not make it operationally less sterile. There is ample Christian ethics in the resolutions, admonitions and instructions of the *Discipline* as ordered by the General Conference to get desegregation and integration accomplished, if this were what is lacking. The other components outlined above show that the nature and sources of the dilemmas in the cumulative dynamics of the church are not primarily in theological formulation but in motives and institutionalized non-doctrinal factors.

(12) There are scandalously wide discrepancies in church size, salary scales, educational achievement and pension provisions between the Central Jurisdiction areas and those in the regional jurisdictions.

(13) Some of the top leadership of the Central

Jurisdiction stands to lose by the complete desegregation of the church. Few corresponding white leaders have shown any disposition to offer their positions, and no Negroes have been appointed to the highest administrative posts in general boards and agencies.

(14) In the Boston University study already referred to there were significant distributions in the responses to a question on race in the organization of the Methodist Church. However, except for the Southeastern Jurisdiction, every jurisdiction holds to abolition directly, or combined with permissive legislation at the annual and local church level.

Dilemmas of Constitutional Goals

Other components in the complex dilemmas of Methodist life became clear in the period of writing the report.

In 1956 Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam attacked the jurisdictional system in all its parts at the meeting of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, following the General Conference session that had ordered the study of the system as a whole. He thus became the symbol and leader of opposition not only to the Central Jurisdiction but to the jurisdictional system both in theory and in practice. His attack was impressive and placed him in a key power position in the work of the Commission of Seventy.

His address aroused a massive defensive response, particularly from the Southeastern Jurisdiction which had developed its jurisdictional organization and program more fully than any other region. The leadership symbol for that section was Bishop Arthur J. Moore. The power conflicts in the work of the Commission were many, but they tended to polarize around these two personalities. Their compromises had definite results.

In the northern and western regions of America there has been little jurisdictional consciousness. The pluralism of annual conferences, areas and individual personalities have made for a diffuse response on many of the issues. However, in the South there has been a strong sense of sectional solidarity. Northern and western commission members frequently noted that their colleagues from the Southeastern Jurisdiction behaved like a bloc and seemed to have done a lot of extra-curricular consultation.

Behind this power play in the Commission lies a basic conflict in the philosophies of the present constitution of the Methodist Church. The racial issue is deeply entangled in issues of the power

of the General Conference and the role and authority of the bishops. The South since before 1844 has had a low view of the General Conference and a high view of episcopal power. The North has liked a strong, unified General Conference and has operated with a more democratic view of the bishop's role.

Regional autonomy has been stressed by the South and was involved in every plan of union. The North accepted jurisdictionalism as a pragmatic compromise at the time of union and still considers it a concession. The conception of regional self-determination has always seemed to them a serious division in the idea of the church itself, though the South tends to treat the jurisdiction as a constitutive principle of church government.

Since the South has championed the jurisdictional system as a conserver of regional values it is well to inquire what these values are and whether the jurisdictional system is needed to protect them. No explicit list of such values has ever been developed. Whenever I have tried to get below the surface of the defense of jurisdictionalism, I have found an attack on central government, a fear that the General Conference would invade or intervene into the folkways, mores and customs of the South. Whenever I have tried to get explicit information about which values were at stake, I have found that it involved racial patterns.

There is no doubt that unity in the constitution of the church was bought at the price of continued local segregation. This price was not only one of social justice but (and here the Drew critique is valid) one of the church itself. A church cannot define its actual Christian character by pointing to integration at the associative and administrative level of boards and agencies, but by what happens at the table of the Lord in a local church.

The only thing the South has had to fear from the General Conference was lock-stitched into racial injustice. Abolish the Central Jurisdiction and the ultimate *raison d'être* of the jurisdictional system is gone. But the idea of regional autonomy has become a fixed idea.

The role and power of the Southern bishops must not be overlooked. Before unification they reserved for themselves the right to speak on social questions in behalf of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In many ways they have continued to exert a special force since 1939. When the

(Continued on page 44.)

FILMS

HOLLYWOOD'S ESCHATOLOGY

The Stanley Kramer film *On the Beach* is doing splendidly at the box office and has received considerable critical acclaim. It is presented as a mature film dealing with the paralyzing question of human extinction in our time.

The irony is that it is appallingly immature and inexpert in nearly every department from script to actors to editing. This, not its theme, is what evokes in me the shudder of horror. Not that human life is about to be extinguished but that human existence as portrayed has become so flat, juiceless and vapid that its quiet erasure seems almost a relief. If violent death instead were to come to any of the principals, one feels no blood would gush out, only damp breakfast cereal or vitamin syrup . . . or nothing at all.

The story, in case you missed the novel, the paperback, the syndicated column and numberless conversations or the film, is stark and simple. Hydrogen warfare has obliterated all but a tiny pocket of human life on the coast of Australia. It concerns the last days of this community as they watch the lights go out on our pathetic planet. The interest is focused on their reactions and relationship to one another and on the numbing fact of inevitable death. The mode is realism. There is an older couple in love, a young married couple in love, a cynical scientist; a few wry and courageous bit players and a submarine. No one survives. Hardly a situation you would expect to be tedious to watch, but it is.

The thread of the story is beyond those who do not know Nevil Shute's book. Sequences are simply juxtaposed without any inner logic—even simple themes must have connectives. Where it is not unfocused, it is obvious, as in the last scene when the minatory banner of the Salvation Army is shown flapping in an empty park and, in case you don't "get it," a full symphony orchestra crashes ponderously while you stare at the words "THERE IS STILL TIME, BROTHER." By then I wasn't in a mood to grant even that.

Because of its one-dimensional quality of moral preachment the actors never come alive; they move like sleepy puppets through their paces with never a surprise, except for one moment when Ava Gardner gives a brief revelation of the pathos of a life unfulfilled. That moment is true realism and not simply verisimilitude, and what a difference! The other actors seem disoriented. Gregory Peck is wooden and handsome, living in a trauma that I thought was his own until the script ascribes it to his family's death. Tony Perkins projects boredom toward the whole project and seems preoccupied with matters more personal than the end of the world. Fred Astaire is light and lost in a role that cries out for weight, not to say *Angst*. What is meant to be cynicism comes out as flippancy.

This awesome theme is treated with a basic shallowness. There is the false, stereotyped conversation in the officer's wardroom of the submarine about the reason and meaning of the ultimate catastrophe. A moment that cried out for some serious probing. What better time, all of us confined underwater with a long way to go? But the possibility of serious discussion is not even suggested. Here the inner emptiness of this film might have been allayed. Instead the scene is played almost flippantly . . . a smudged, third-carbon concept of "how men act in war." Those who have had experience of such times know that when the pressure of combat, hunger or whatever are temporarily removed, politics, philosophy, even theology are live issues. "What is it all about?" "Why me?" "Why now?" Of course, never as live an issue as sex but not such a poor second, either. Thus is perpetuated the image of the good-natured but empty-headed Americans.

The pertinent observation here, I think, is that *On the Beach* represents less a failure of Hollywood (after all a wide-screen billboard may be what Kramer wanted) than a stinging indictment of the shallowness of American minds and spirits—the ineffectuality of the Judeo-Christian thought forms. How is it possible for such a picture to be made and not one single moral or spiritual issue raised? Is it because the churches have nothing to say, or because nobody was listening? This film, as antiseptic as if wrapped in cellophane, showing no signs of being made in a Jewish-Christian culture (except for a Salvation Army episode that has only a theatrical function) comes as a sign and portent of a threat more potent than atomic destruction—the blank space in the heart of man.

If *On the Beach* is symptomatic even at the popular level of the creative exploration of the significance of our plight, Khrushchev won't have to bury us . . . we'll just fade out in the best magic-lantern tradition . . . well fed, smiling, with shining teeth and bright but vacuous eyes. That *On the Beach* could be made, promoted and so received is a sobering revelation of the Christian default in the world of mass art; not a lack of skill with tools and techniques but the final defeat—the loss of the minds and loyalties of the creators.

SIDNEY LANIER

In Our Next Issue

M. M. THOMAS discusses the question: Is Indian democracy outgrowing Nehru?

"Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has often been criticized as the one serious obstacle to the development of a real opposition to the Congress Party in India. The late Dr. John Mathai, former Finance Minister, thought that Nehru's leadership invested the Congress Party with the halo of a national movement even after Independence and advised Nehru to get out of it to facilitate the development of healthy party politics."

Methodism (continued from page 42)

Council of Bishops as a whole endorsed the Supreme Court decision in 1954, the bishops of the Southeastern Jurisdiction took a separate and different view as a jurisdictional college following the council meeting.

A significant illustration of the role and power of the bishops is also evident in the work of the Commission. As a part of the plan of study, hearings were arranged in every jurisdiction to give all parts of the church an opportunity to express themselves. Hearings were held in twenty-four cities. Only in the Southeastern Jurisdiction did the bishops prepare a long detailed "white paper" on the philosophy, history and issues. They recommended holding to the *status quo*.

This report was widely circulated throughout the region before the hearings were held. In one city it was read before any testimony was taken. The appointive powers of the bishops being what they are, the function of the bishop's "white paper" needs no elaboration. Some pastors wrote letters on the issues to the Commission and asked that their names not be made public.

It was my responsibility to serve on the panel in the Central Jurisdiction. We held hearings in Baltimore, Oremburg, New Orleans and St. Louis. The Negro testimony was almost unanimous to abolish the Central Jurisdiction. It would be difficult to overstate the feelings of laymen and clergy alike in their opposition to this "symbol of segregation." When, however, we asked for next steps for its abolition, clear ideas were hard to come by. Abolish the Central Jurisdiction as a constitutional fact and the Negro Methodists still have to face almost a complete absence of communication and fellowship in their local communities.

A special dilemma faces the Negro bishops. Should they support the abolition of the jurisdiction and see their people set adrift in a hostile environment? The fact is that a large number of Central Jurisdiction churches are located within the Southeastern Jurisdiction. Should the Negro bishops encourage their stronger northern con-

gregations, which help maintain the morale of the Negro Methodist community, to merge with the geographical conferences, leaving only weaker churches to carry on? Liquidation by attrition through use of Amendment Nine is an inadequate method of desegregation.

The many dilemmas are real and hard. There were times in the last four years when a showdown of power could have produced a majority report with a different profile. At the next General Conference in April it might be possible to force such a showdown, but should the issues be resolved in this manner? I do not believe that the Commission is fulfilling the assignment that the General Conference gave it to do. It might have been well if we had stated that under present circumstances we could not produce a satisfactory report. I shall not feel frustrated if the report is rejected.

However, between the pressures of the Alabama laymen on the one hand and the Drew faculty on the other, enough people may believe the present document is the best compromise that can be devised at present to pass it. But whether rejected, passed or amended, I am persuaded that the report's mandate for all-out fellowship through the annual conferences and a vigorous interracial evangelism is an inescapable Christian demand.

CHRISTIANITY and CRISIS

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